

Eureka!!!

How to unlock your creative potential and drive consistent growth and innovation.

BY **SCOTT STEINBERG**

Evolutionary thinking creates a blueprint for routine and business-as-usual industry advancement, or so the theory goes. But *revolutionary* thinking is also a crucial skill to add to your executive toolkit, as creative leaders have been shown to consistently outperform peers on an array of key financial metrics. Which raises the question:

What can you do to spark more “eureka moments” within your own firm—and inspire yourself and others to consistently do your best thinking? >>>





SORTING IT ALL OUT

Everyone processes information differently, and there's no universal approach to doing our best thinking. To help spark breakthrough moments, investing in creativity makes good business sense.



Take a More Anticipatory Outlook

Tomorrow belongs to what

Harvard Business Review authors Anika Savage and Michael Sales call anticipatory leaders: those who stay open-minded, are adaptable to change and plan proactively. **You can boost your creative potential by routinely pausing to consider what's coming next for your field.** Sample exercises that encourage executives to engage include brainstorming unforeseen events that might impact their business and discussing how to handle them. >>>



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—Adam Grant
Professor
Wharton School

The late Steve Jobs famously preferred to take one-on-one meetings while walking Apple’s Cupertino, California, campus to get his creative juices flowing. He even designed the offices of Apple and Pixar to facilitate unexpected and fortuitous encounters between employees. Former LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner espouses the power of daily meditation. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos specifically avoids day-to-day management tasks so he can focus his time exclusively on brainstorming new ideas and thinking two to three years out. Alternatively, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg prefers to open his mind through hikes.

Looking at the world’s most successful business leaders, one thing is apparent: From immersing yourself in the works of classic philosophers to organizing regular pitch meetings, there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to sparking breakthrough moments. Rather, teaching yourself to be more creative as a business leader is all about making room to focus on big-picture ideas by pursuing more leisurely, perspective-generating activities. Challenge the status quo, and question assumptions and prevailing beliefs to get outside the current paradigm.

Why invest in creativity with so many other needs competing for your attention? It simply makes good business sense. In fact, according to surveys of more than 1,500 chief executives from 60 countries and 33 global industries, creativity is now the most crucial factor in business success—topping even experience, management style or vision. The good news: Creativity is absolutely a skill that can be taught, according to recent findings in the *Journal of Research in Personality* and the *Journal of Creative Behavior*. Moreover, according to Zorana Ivcevic Pringle, Ph.D., director of the Creativity and Emotions Lab at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, it’s also a basic mental muscle of sorts that needs to be strengthened through regular exercise.

One of the simplest techniques for sparking creativity (especially in a setting where individuals are prone to groupthink or avoid speaking up) is to have participants write their thoughts on paper first, and then share, says professor Adam Grant of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. “There is some evidence that in a brainstorming or a brain-writing exercise, your first 20 ideas are actually less creative than your next 15 . . . and that if you want to max out on creativity, you actually need 200 ideas on the table before you hit the highest point of novelty,” he recently told CNBC. “The easiest way to kill creativity is to judge your own work as you produce it,” Mr. Grant says. “Creativity thrives on curiosity and flexibility. Quality control depends on precision. Resist the temptation to edit as you create. Save revising for a separate phase.” And remember, quantity breeds quality.

4 Steps to Being More Creative

Marketing professors Rom Schrift and Jerry Yoram Wind, who’ve taught years’ worth of courses on creativity at Wharton, note that our individual propensity for creativity varies. **However, you can train yourself to be more creative by following a simple four-step model.** >>>



Encourage Collaborative Divergence

The world's most creative and successful executives recognize that winning ideas can come from anywhere. This is why more organizations are boosting their creative potential by embracing outside-in and inside-out approaches to innovation. **Outside-in** (or open) **innovation involves inviting input from external sources such as the academic or startup communities to help scale and accelerate innovation.** Often these ideas come from people on the fringes of an industry or even outside of it; they are not constrained by the same mindset and thinking as those at the center. **Inside-out innovation is the practice of taking tools and technologies** (e.g., platforms for data sharing that you've built) **and giving others the ability to incorporate them into their own innovation processes.**

The world's most celebrated executive leaders are also making it a priority to help frontline workers discover new insights that can bubble up to the C-suite. That's why, from corporate icons to startups, more companies are using *Shark Tank*-style competitions, inviting "intrapreneurs" (entrepreneurial thinkers inside the business) to exercise their creativity. From data storage company Dell EMC's online contests, which invite thousands of staffers to post new inventions and vote on which should receive real-world rollouts, to Starbucks' open invitations to the public to submit product ideas, methods for unlocking creativity in corporate America have suddenly become plentiful. Finding new ones is becoming more of a must-do for executive leaders. >>>



Embrace the Power of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, or EQ, is the ability to recognize and manage your own and others' emotions, and to use these skills to communicate and empathize more effectively and drive positive change. As tasks become more complex, learning to successfully deploy such skills will only become more crucial. Moreover, according to Yale's Pringle, "everyday innovators are masters of using emotions to identify problems worth solving," and in creative fashion. That's why it's also important to teach yourself to use your emotions as a radar of sorts that can help you spot new ideas worth pursuing.

For example, Instacart's billionaire founder Apoorva Mehta intensely disliked the grocery store experience and used these feelings as motivation to identify a pressing need and solve the problem of online grocery shopping.

Likewise, Dollar Shave Club founder Michael Dubin recognized his (and others') frustration with paying steep prices for blades from a handful of manufacturers and used it as inspiration to minimize shoppers' cost and hassle. He also found a clever way to market a story that customers could get behind en masse.

Taking time to reflect on our emotions—which meditation or quiet introspection provides—can boost creativity by helping us identify real-life problems that need solving, says Ms. Pringle, and offer clues that can help us come up with creative solutions. >>>



Build Expert Communities Around You

No one can predict the future with pinpoint accuracy. But you can improve your chances by making the process of brainstorming and practicing the art of futurism (thinking through future scenarios) a more collaborative affair. That means **cultivating diversity of thought, perspective and background among your teams and surrounding yourself with diverse advisers with education and expertise in different domains.**

For example, peruse Challenge.gov, and you'll see that even government agencies such as NASA, with some of the world's brightest minds, are asking the public through contests for help in developing tomorrow's most advanced solutions. Likewise, pharmaceutical leaders including Roche are inviting armchair inventors to think of ways to slow the spread of COVID-19.

As it turns out, you don't need formal training to become more creative and tap into eureka moments. You just need to be more in tune with your emotions and intuition, more engaged in unstructured thought and conversation, and willing to open yourself up to more possibilities and approaches. Put simply: When it comes to creativity, often what you don't know is just as important as what you do know. What's more, possessing strong but weakly held opinions—which encourage us to make informed decisions, move forward and then revise these opinions as more data is gained—is key to finding success. IQ